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Some Capitol riot suspects apologize as consequences sink in

PHOENIX (AP) — The helmet-wearing Idaho man photographed dangling by one hand from the Senate's balcony during the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol turned himself in six days later. While buckled in the vehicle delivering him to the Boise jail, Josiah Colt made a video apologizing and expressing shame for storming the building. Jacob Chansley, the self-described QAnon Shaman who posed for photos on the Senate dais while sporting face paint and a furry hat with horns, also lacks the enthusiasm he once showed for the riot. A month later, he wrote an apology from jail, asking for understanding as he was coming to grips with his actions.

Confronted with compelling video and photographic evidence in court, dozens of rioters have apologized and expressed regret as the consequences of their actions have started to sink in. The ramifications include potential job losses, financial ruin and possible time behind bars. "This is going to have consequences for these people for the rest of their lives — and it should," said John Flannery, a former federal prosecutor and Capitol Hill lawyer. Another possible consequence for Colt and others captured in photographs that went viral before they even left the Capitol building: ignominy beyond their lifetimes as those images make their way into history books.



In this Wednesday, Jan. 6, 2021 file photo, supporters of President Donald Trump, including Jacob Chansley, right with fur hat, are confronted by U.S. Capitol Police officers outside the Senate Chamber inside the Capitol in Washington

Confronted with com-

Continued on next page

Associated Press

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Continued from Front

A lawyer for Dominic Pezzola, who authorities say is a member of the extremist group Proud Boys and broke a Capitol window with a police shield, said in a filing that his client's incarceration has placed his wife and two children in desperate financial straits. Several workers at a floor installation business Pezzola manages are also out of work because Pezzola is jailed, attorney Jonathan Zucker wrote in a February filing seeking Pezzola's release pending trial. Pezzola, the attorney wrote, was sorry for his actions, which included posting a video giving a triumphant speech inside the Capitol while smoking a "victory" cigar. "Since his arrest, having time to reflect and see how things have revealed



In this Jan. 6, 2021, file photo, rioters, including Dominic Pezzola, center with beard, are confronted by U.S. Capitol Police officers outside the Senate Chamber inside the Capitol in Washington
Associated Press

themselves, he now realizes he was duped into these mistaken beliefs " that the election was stolen from President Donald Trump, Zucker wrote. Colt, who had expressed devotion to Trump and called House Speaker Nancy Pelosi a traitor, seemed to recognize the long-term consequences of his ac-

tions in the Capitol in the minutes before his arrest as he spoke on the video, later posted by KBOI-TV. "I never intended to do anything that would bring a black eye to my family, country, me," he said, adding that he had received death threats. Regret has struck some rioters sooner than others.

The day after Chad Jones allegedly swung a flag pole at police just outside the House chamber, he told a friend he was an "idiot," adding he knew he was "in big trouble," according to court documents. He was right. A week later a federal complaint charged him with, among other things, using a weapon — the flag pole — to assault an officer. The charges carry a maximum 60 years in prison. Samuel Camargo, who had posted a video on Instagram showing him tussling with police trying to get through a door to the Capitol, was on Facebook a day later with his apology. "I'm sorry to all the people I've disappointed as this is not who I am nor what I stand for," he wrote. Camargo, too, was charged. It didn't necessarily help his case. A judge ordered Camargo, who was arrested in Washington on Inauguration Day, jailed until trial after concluding no release condition could ensure Camargo's future appearance in court. As a procession of rioters ended up before federal judges, some issuing apologies before they got to court, it was impossible to discern who was sincerely sorry and who was expressing contrition in a preemptive bid for leniency from the court. From behind bars after his arrest in March and with a bond hearing upcoming, 18-year-old rioter Bruno Joseph Cua penned a letter to his judge, assuring the court he was regretful and

had been humbled by the experience. "Lesson fully received, your Honor," Cua wrote, according to court documents. Two months earlier Cua posted enthusiastic notes on social media saying he'd been part of history in joining throngs rushing the Capitol, charging documents say. He added in a sentence that jurors would likely take as an admission of guilt: "Yes, we physically fought our way in." Among the rude awakenings: No plea deals yet, though they may be in the works. Given it was an attack on what many regard as the citadel of American democracy, the sentiment among prosecutors, judges and the public at large, at least for now, isn't exactly lenient. Pezzola's judge denied his request for bond, citing a potential danger to the community and saying Pezzola's expressions of regret now can't outweigh evidence that he "was willing to play an important role in an act of political violence." To date, more than 300 Capitol Hill rioters have been charged. Several are accused of careful planning and of coordinating the attack on Jan. 6. Most aren't accused of committing violence or damaging property but of walking past security lines and entering restricted areas. In most cases, there's little dispute those charged did breach the Capitol building, having provided evidence of that themselves in selfies and videos posted online. □

Due to the religious holidays, Aruba Today will not be published on Friday, April 2nd, Saturday, April 3rd, and Monday, April 5th, 2021. We will resume our regular printing schedule on Tuesday, April, 6th, 2021. We thank you for your support.

Keep Safe!

Reversing Trump, Pentagon to release new transgender policy

By LOLITA C. BALDOR

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon on Wednesday will sweep away Trump-era policies that largely banned transgender people from serving in the military, issuing new rules that offer them wider access to medical care and assistance with gender transition, defense officials told The Associated Press.

The new department regulations allow transgender people who meet military standards to enlist and serve openly in their self-identified gender, and they will be able to get medically necessary transition-related care authorized by law, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal decisions not yet made public.

The changes come after a two-month Pentagon review aimed at developing guidelines for the new policy, which was announced by President Joe Biden just days after he took office in January.

Biden's executive order overturned the Trump policy and immediately prohibited any service member from being forced out of the military on the basis of gender identity. Defense



In this July 26, 2017 file photo, people with the Human Rights Campaign hold up "equality flags" during an event on Capitol Hill in Washington, in support of transgender members of the military. Associated Press

Secretary Lloyd Austin then gave the Pentagon two months to finalize the more detailed regulations that the military services will follow.

The new rules also prohibit discrimination based on gender identity. Their expected release Wednesday coincides with International Transgender Day of Visibility.

Austin has also called for a reexamination of the records of service members who were discharged or denied reenlistment because of gender identity

issues under the previous policy. Results of that review have not been released.

Until a few years ago, service members could be discharged from the military for being transgender, but that changed during the Obama administration. In 2016, the Pentagon announced that transgender people already serving in the military would be allowed to serve openly, and that by July 2017, they would be allowed to enlist. After Donald Trump took office, however, his admin-

istration delayed the enlistment date and called for additional study. A few weeks later, Trump caught military leaders by surprise, tweeting that the government wouldn't accept or allow transgender people to serve "in any capacity" in the military.

After a lengthy and complicated legal battle and additional reviews, the Defense Department in April 2019 approved a policy that fell short of an all-out ban but barred transgender troops and recruits from transitioning to another sex

and required most individuals to serve in what the administration called their "birth gender."

Under that policy, currently serving transgender troops and anyone who had signed an enlistment contract before the effective date could continue with plans for hormone treatments and gender transition if they had been diagnosed with gender dysphoria.

But after that date, no one with gender dysphoria who was taking hormones or had transitioned to another gender was allowed to enlist. Troops that were already serving and were diagnosed with gender dysphoria were required to serve in the gender assigned at birth and were barred from taking hormones or getting transition surgery.

The new policies being released Wednesday are similar to those developed in 2016.

As of 2019, an estimated 14,700 troops on active duty and in the reserves identify as transgender, but not all seek treatment. There are more than 1.3 million active-duty troops and close to 800,000 in the National Guard and Reserves. □

Delta joins other U.S. airlines in ending empty middle seats

By DAVID KOENIG

AP Airlines Writer

Delta Air Lines, the last U.S. airline still blocking middle seats, will end that policy in May as air travel recovers and more people become vaccinated against COVID-19.

The decision announced Wednesday reversed a policy that had been in place since last April, and which Delta's CEO had repeatedly cited as raising trust in the airline.

CEO Ed Bastian said Wednesday that nearly 65% of people who flew on Delta last year expect to have at least one dose of the new vaccines by May 1. That, he said, gave Delta the assurance to end seating limits.

The airline industry was divided over the utility of blocking middle seats to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 on a flight. Airlines including Delta, Southwest, Alaska and JetBlue limited seating for months, while United Airlines never did and American did so only briefly.

Social-distancing is hard if not impossible on an airplane, even with middle seats empty — a point that United CEO Scott Kirby made many times to explain his airline's resistance to seat-blocking.

All the airlines mounted an aggressive campaign to reassure travelers about the safety of flights as long as everyone wears a mask — that's now a federal re-

quirement. They paid for a Harvard University report that concluded the risk of spreading the virus during a flight is low in part because of strong ventilation and high-grade air filters on most planes.

Air travel in the United States is recovering from pandemic lows. More than 1 million travelers have gone through U.S. airports for each of the last 20 days, although March traffic remains down nearly half from the same month in 2019.

The numbers are rising heading into the crucial summer vacation season. Last summer was a catastrophe for the airlines, contributing to Delta's full-year loss of more than \$12 billion.



In this Wednesday, Feb. 3, 2021, file photo, a passenger wears a face mask she travels on a Delta Air Lines flight after taking off from Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta. Associated Press

The airlines are eager to boost revenue as quickly as possible, and that means selling more seats.

Delta announced a smorgasbord of other changes. Tickets bought or expir-

ing this year will be good through the end of 2022, Delta will offer a quicker path to elite status in its loyalty program for the rest of 2021, and it will bring back snacks on April 14. □

GOP Rep. Gaetz investigated over sexual relationship

By **MICHAEL BALSAMO, ERIC TUCKER and ALAN FRAM**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican Rep. Matt Gaetz, a prominent conservative in Congress and a close ally of former President Donald Trump, said Tuesday he is being investigated by the Justice Department over a former relationship but denied any criminal wrongdoing.

Gaetz, who represents parts of western Florida, is accused of having a sexual relationship with a 17-year-old girl and paying her to travel with him, and he is under investigation to determine if he violated federal sex trafficking laws, a person familiar with the case told The Associated Press.

The probe has been underway for nearly a year and Gaetz has been aware for months that he was under investigation, the person said. The Justice Department has also been looking into whether Gaetz, 38, may have also been involved in relationships with other underage girls, the person said.

The person could not publicly discuss the details of an ongoing investigation and spoke to the AP on condi-



In this Feb. 26, 2021, file photo Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., speaks at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Orlando, Fla.

Associated Press

tion of anonymity.

Gaetz told Axios that his lawyers were informed that he was the subject of an investigation "regarding sexual conduct with women" but that he was not a target of the probe. He denied that he ever had a relationship with any underage girls and said the allegations against him were "as searing as they are false."

A subject is conventionally thought of as someone whose actions fall within the scope of a criminal

investigation, whereas a target is someone whom prosecutors have gathered evidence linking to a crime. But during the course of an investigation, a subject can become a target.

Gaetz's comments came shortly after The New York Times first reported the investigation. It is a federal crime to transport a minor over state lines for sex.

Gaetz said that the allegations were part of an extortion plot by a former Justice Department official.

"Over the past several weeks my family and I have been victims of an organized criminal extortion involving a former DOJ official seeking \$25 million while threatening to smear my name," Gaetz said in a statement.

Gaetz said his family has been cooperating with the FBI and said his father was wearing a recording device, at the FBI's direction, "to catch these criminals." He demanded the Justice Department release the re-

cordings.

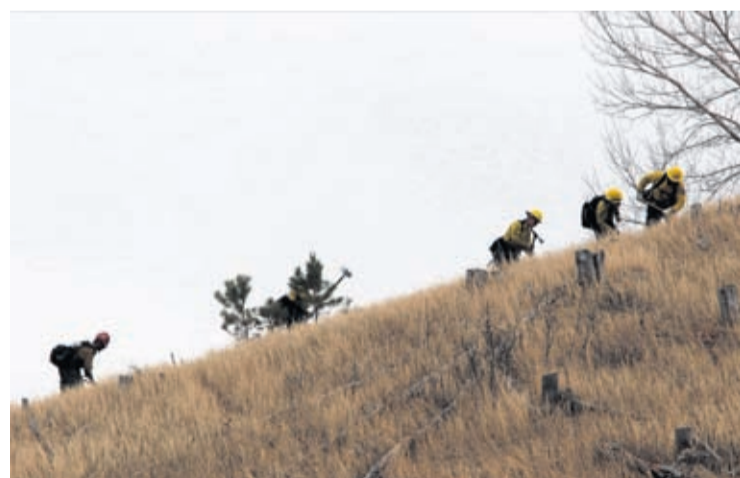
"No part of the allegations against me are true, and the people pushing these lies are targets of the ongoing extortion investigation," he said.

The Times cited three people familiar with the matter, saying the scrutiny was part of a broader Justice Department probe into one of his political allies and fellow Florida politician, Joel Greenberg, who was indicted last summer on sex trafficking and other charges that he stalked a political opponent. A judge ordered the former tax collector back to jail earlier this month for violating the conditions of his release.

"I believe that there are people at the Department of Justice who are trying to criminalize my sexual conduct, you know, when I was a single guy," Gaetz told Axios.

"I have definitely, in my single days, provided for women I've dated," Gaetz said. "You know, I've paid for flights, for hotel rooms. I've been, you know, generous as a partner. I think someone is trying to make that look criminal when it is not." Gaetz has not been charged with a crime. The Justice Department did not immediately comment. □

Firefighters make progress containing Black Hills fires



Firefighters battling wildfires in the Black Hills of South Dakota create a trench with axes on a hillside west of Rapid City on Monday, March 29, 2021.

Associated Press

NEMO, S.D. (AP) — Firefighters continued to make progress Wednesday on containing wildfires in the Black Hills of South Dako-

ta that earlier forced the evacuation of more than 400 homes.

Fire crews have increased containment of the largest

fire near Schroeder Road in the Nemo area to 47%, the Pennington County Sheriff's Office said in a Facebook post Wednesday. The Schroeder Road fire has burned nearly 3.4 square miles (8.8 square kilometers).

Law enforcement officers opened some neighborhoods that had been evacuated, but were only admitting people who live there. Residents were asked to remain on their property and not to call 911 unless there is imminent danger from fire flare-ups.

The Schroeder Road fire has crossed into two neighborhoods near Rapid City, according to the sheriff's office. At least one home

has been destroyed, as well as several other structures. No injuries have been reported. Two smaller blazes were burning southwest of Rapid City, including one inside the grounds of Mount Rushmore National Memorial, which remained closed Wednesday.

The fire continued to burn in steep, rough country inaccessible by roads, officials said. Heavy airtankers and helicopters supported ground firefighters as they protected homes and worked to contain the fire. The wind remained a factor in firefighting efforts, but was not as strong as it was on Monday and Tuesday, fire officials said.

Strong winds and drought

conditions also fueled a wildfire in western North Dakota, where a firefighter was injured in a fire truck crash due to low visibility from smoke. The injuries are not believed to be life-threatening.

The fire has burned about 1 square mile (2.6 square kilometers) north of Richardson in Stark County, officials said. An abandoned building burned in the blaze, as did fences, power lines and utility poles. Montana-Dakota Utilities spokesman Mark Hanson said the fire damaged five of the company's structures, causing one to collapse.

A downed power line was believed to have started the fire. □

Russia: Navalny on hunger strike to protest prison treatment

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV
Associated Press

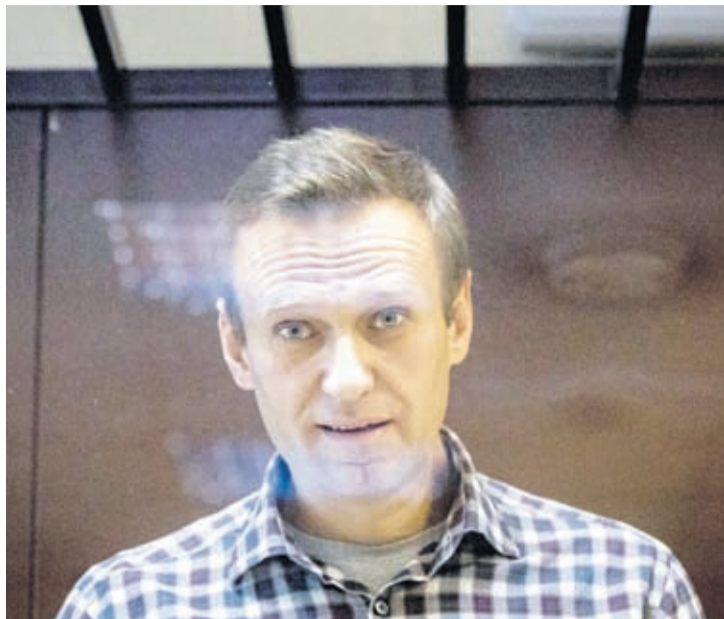
MOSCOW (AP) — Imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny said Wednesday he has started a hunger strike to protest authorities' failure to provide proper treatment for his back and leg pains.

In a statement posted on Instagram, Navalny complained about prison officials' refusal to give him the right medicines and to allow his doctor to visit him behind bars.

He also protested the hourly checks a guard makes on him at night, saying they amount to sleep deprivation torture.

The 44-year-old Navalny, who is President Vladimir Putin's most outspoken domestic opponent, was arrested in January upon his return from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from a nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin. Russian authorities have rejected the accusation.

Navalny's poisoning and conviction have further strained Russia's ties with the United States and the European Union, which sank to post-Cold War lows after Moscow's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimea, its meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, hacking attacks and other actions.



In this photo taken on Saturday, Feb. 20, 2021, Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny looks at photographers standing behind a glass of the cage in the Babuskinsky District Court in Moscow, Russia.

Associated Press

His arrest fueled a series of protests that drew tens of thousands across Russia. Authorities detained about 11,000 people, many of whom were fined or given jail terms of up to two weeks.

Navalny said the August poisoning made him wonder about the cause of his current ailments. He said he had no choice but to start a hunger strike because his physical condition has worsened, with back pains having spread to his right leg and numbness in his left leg. "What else could I do?" he wrote. "I have declared a hunger strike demanding that they allow a

visit by an invited doctor in compliance with the law. So I'm lying here, hungry, but still with two legs."

Last month, Navalny was sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison for violating the terms of his probation during convalescence in Germany. The sentence stems from a 2014 embezzlement conviction that Navalny has rejected as fabricated — and which the European Court of Human Rights has ruled to be unlawful.

Navalny was moved this month from a Moscow jail to a penal colony in Pokrov in the Vladimir region, 85 kilometers (53 miles) east of the Russian capital. The fa-

cility called IK-2 stands out among Russian penitentiaries for its particularly strict inmate routines, which include standing to attention for hours.

Navalny's Instagram also had a picture of a letter to the prison chief, dated Wednesday, in which he announced the hunger strike. "Every convict has the right to invite a specialist for a check and consultation," he wrote. "So I demand to let a doctor see me and declare a hunger strike until it happens."

In a sarcastic reference to the nerve agent poisoning that he blamed on Russia's top security agency, the FSB, Navalny wrote to the prison chief that "given a recent attempt by the FSB operatives to kill me with chemical weapons, which state-controlled medics cast as a 'metabolic problem,' I'm haunted by vague doubts about the cause of my illness and recovery prospects."

Russia's prison service said last week that Navalny had undergone medical check-ups and described his condition as "stable and satisfactory." In a statement that followed his declaration of a hunger strike, it claimed that Navalny is being given "all the necessary medical assistance in accordance with his current health indicators."

But Navalny has complained that authorities only gave him basic painkiller pills and ointment for his back and legs while refusing to accept medications prescribed earlier by his doctor or to share the diagnosis from his examination.

In a note earlier this month, Navalny described his prison as a "friendly concentration camp." He said he hadn't seen "even a hint of violence" there but lived under controls that he compared to those described in George Orwell's novel "Nineteen Eighty-Four."

Earlier this week, he said he already had received six reprimands — warnings that could lead to solitary confinement — for offenses such as getting up 10 minutes before the wake-up call and refusing to watch a video lecture that he called "idiotic."

Navalny, whom prison authorities had earlier marked as a flight risk, said he was subject to particularly close oversight, including a guard waking him up every hour at night and filming him to demonstrate he is in the required place.

"Instead of medical assistance, I'm subjected to sleep deprivation torture, being woken up eight times every night," he said in Wednesday's statement. □

As tensions ease, Pakistan allows partial trade with India

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan on Wednesday lifted a two-year ban on the import of sugar and cotton from nuclear-rival neighboring India, a major move aimed at reviving trade ties with New Delhi amid easing tensions, Pakistan's finance minister said.

The decision to partially resume trade ties by allowing the import of cotton and 0.5 tons of sugar from India was taken at a meeting of the economic coordination council, Pakistan's top decision-making body on commerce, said Hammad Azhar, the minister.



In this Feb. 26, 2009 file photo, an Indian border security force soldier stands guard as an Indian truck, exporting goods to Pakistan, returns back towards the Indian side of joint check post between India and Pakistan at Wagah, India.

Associated Press

Azhar told reporters at a news conference that Pakistan may allow the import of more Indian items in the future, according to the country's needs. India is believed to be one of the biggest producers of sugar and cotton in the region. The minister added that sugar imports from India would help to reduce the soaring prices of sugar in the country. Sugar produced in India is about 20% cheaper, compared to sugar produced in Pakistan, he said.

The announcement comes days after Pakistan and

India exchanged peace overtures, saying they wanted peaceful ties with each other. Pakistan suspended trade with India in 2019 after New Delhi stripped the Indian-controlled section of Kashmir of its statehood and special constitutional status.

The disputed Himalayan region is split between Pakistan and India but claimed by both in its entirety. The archrivals have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir since gaining independence from Britain in 1947. □

Woman killed after shooting gun in Indonesia's police HQ

By NINIEK KARMINI

Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP)

— A woman entered Indonesia's National Police Headquarters in Jakarta and fired a gun at several officers before being shot dead by police, in the latest militant attack in the world's most populous Muslim nation, officials said. There were no reports of injuries among the police.

Authorities had earlier imposed a counterterrorism crackdown and were on heightened alert for possible attacks against police and places of worship following a suicide bombing during Palm Sunday Mass at a Roman Catholic cathedral on Sulawesi island which wounded at least 20 people.

Television video on Wednesday showed a woman wearing a long black robe and a blue veil walking near a parking lot at the police headquarters toward the police chief's office building. She pointed a gun and fired at several police officers before being shot dead by other officers, National Police Chief Listyo Sigit Prabowo said.



Police officers stand guard at the main gate of the National Police Headquarters following a suspected militant attack in Jakarta, Indonesia, Wednesday, March 31, 2021.

Associated Press

A bomb squad member approached her body, which was lying in the rain with the gun nearby, and determined there were no dangerous materials in the area before the body was removed, the videos showed.

Prabowo identified the woman by her initials, ZA, and said she was a 25-year-

old university dropout. He said at a news conference late Wednesday that she came to the main building's security post and fired at officers six times, prompting other officers "to take decisive action." He didn't say whether any police were injured. Televised videos indicated she was about 10 meters (30

feet) from the nearest officers, who ran into the building when she fired.

A preliminary investigation showed she was acting independently, "a lone wolf with the radical ideology of the Islamic State," he said. "However, we will continue to thoroughly investigate any possible connection of radical networks to the sus-

pect," Prabowo said.

Before she died, the woman said goodbye to her family in a WhatsApp message, he said.

On Sunday, a recently married couple with suspected militant links used pressure cooker bombs to blow themselves up outside the Sacred Heart of Jesus Cathedral in Makassar, the capital of South Sulawesi island.

The attackers detonated their bombs when they were confronted by guards outside the church.

They were believed to have been members of Jemaah Anshorut Daulah, which has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group and carried out a series of suicide bombings in Indonesia.

They included a 2016 Starbucks attack in Jakarta which killed four civilians and four militants, an attack on a bus terminal in the capital that killed three police officers, and an attack on a church in Kalimantan that killed a 2-year-old girl a year later. Several other children suffered serious burns in the Kalimantan attack. □

Italy orders 2 Russian Embassy officials expelled for spying

By NICOLE WINFIELD

ROME (AP)

— Italy ordered two Russian Embassy officials expelled Wednesday and arrested an Italian Navy captain on spying charges after police caught the officer allegedly giving classified documents to one of the Russians in exchange for

money.

Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio told a joint session of the Italian Parliament's foreign relations committees that the documentation concerned NATO information and that the incident was a "hostile act of extreme gravity."

"It is not just our security at

risk, but that of the entire NATO (alliance), and we cannot accept this," he told lawmakers.

The Foreign Ministry said it summoned Russian Ambassador Sergey Razov to protest the "grave incident" after a sting operation on the outskirts of Rome allegedly caught the Italian and one of the Russians in a "clandestine operation" to exchange the documents for cash late Tuesday.

Italy's Carabinieri paramilitary police said the Italian frigate captain had been arrested. The Russian observed with him, a member of the Russian armed forces stationed at the Russian Embassy in Italy, was initially detained but not immediately placed under arrest given his diplomatic status.

He was ordered expelled along with another Russian Embassy official allegedly involved, Di Maio told lawmakers. Di Maio didn't provide details about the suspected role of the second Russian.

The Russian Embassy in Rome confirmed the detention of a diplomat who belonged to the military attaché's office but wouldn't comment on the incident.

"In any case, we hope that it wouldn't affect bilateral ties," it said in a statement. Italy's special operations forces in Rome staged the sting "during a clandestine operation between the two, surprising them red-handed immediately after the handing over of classified documents by the Italian official in exchange for a sum of money," said the

Carabinieri statement.

The Carabinieri said both were accused of "serious crimes concerning espionage and state security."

Speaking in a conference call with reporters, Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said the Kremlin was unaware of details of the incident, but noted that "we hope that the quite positive and constructive character of the Russian-Italian relations will be preserved."

The Russian Foreign Ministry voiced regret about the diplomats' expulsion in a terse statement carried by Russian news agencies. It added that its "possible steps in connection with the situation that doesn't conform with the level of bilateral ties will be announced later." □



The Russian Embassy in Rome, Wednesday, March 31, 2021.

Associated Press

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In quieter Mexico City, rare bats make an appearance

By **FABIOLA SÁNCHEZ**
MEXICO CITY (AP) — At a Mexico City university campus, researchers are stringing mesh nets between trees, hoping to capture evidence that a rare bat has begun visiting its favorite plants in this metropolis of 9 million. The National Autonomous University's botanical gardens are filled with flowering morning glory, agave plants and cactuses that provide the bats with food; their long tongues and noses have evolved to drink nectar from the blooms. The protected Mexican long-tongued bat was first sighted this year in an even more unlikely location: a zoo at the Chapultepec park in the city's center. Under pandemic rules, the

park was closed or placed under strict visitation limits for much of the past year, and that may have encouraged the bats to come and feast. "It is clear that we have seen that, as human activity declined in the city, wild animals have begun to re-take the city," said Rodrigo Medellín, a biologist at the university's Ecology Institute. "It is really divine justice that the bats are showing they can coexist with us, if only we give them a chance." As people across the globe stay home to stop the spread of the coronavirus, animals have been venturing into places they aren't usually seen. Coyotes have meandered along downtown Chicago's Michigan Avenue and



A Mexican long-tongued bat is held by Mexico's National Autonomous University, UNAM, Ecology Institute Biologist Rodrigo Medellín after it was briefly captured for a study at the university's botanical gardens, amid the new coronavirus pandemic in Mexico City, Tuesday, March 16, 2021.

Associated Press

near San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge. A puma roamed the streets of Santiago, Chile. Goats took over a town in Wales. In India, already daring

wildlife has become bolder with hungry monkeys entering homes and opening refrigerators to look for food. In Mexico, bioluminescent plankton appeared at

some beaches in the normally bustling resort of Acaapulco for the first time in memory, though researchers are not clear about whether a decrease in human activity was responsible. Some think the decline in man-made lighting may have simply made the phenomenon easier to spot. As night begins to fall in the botanical garden in Mexico City, a shout rang out among the researchers. "We got one!" With carefully gloved hands, a student began to take the tiny, 4-inch (10-centimeter) animal out of the net. It could fit in the palm of one hand. Medellín was certain as soon as he saw it: It's a long-tongued bat, distinguishable by the elongated tip of its nose. □

Niger government confirms military coup attempt thwarted

By **DALATOU MAMANE and KRISTA LARSON**
Associated Press
NIAMEY, Niger (AP) — Niger's security forces thwarted an attempted military coup at the West



In this April 4, 2019 file photo, Niger's President Elect Mohamed Bazoum is photographed at a G7 meeting in Paris, France.
Associated Press

African country's presidential palace overnight just two days before the newly elected president is to be sworn into office in a peaceful transfer of power, the government said Wednesday. The coup attempt raises fear of more violence coinciding with newly elected President Mohamed Bazoum's inauguration on Friday. Already his administration faces unprecedented threats from Islamic extremists near its troubled border with Mali. Several people have been arrested in connection with the coup attempt while "others linked to the events are being actively sought," government spokesman Abdourahmane Zakaria said Wednesday afternoon. "The government con-

demns this cowardly and backward act aimed at jeopardizing democracy and the rule of law to which our country is resolutely committed as evidenced by the last democratic, free and transparent elections welcomed by the entire national and international community," Zakaria said. Already fears have been mounting that Bazoum's inauguration could prompt more violence in Niger as the latest massacre killing at least 137 people came on the same day the constitutional court certified his electoral victory. And at least 100 others were killed in villages near the border on the day that Niger announced the presidential election would go to a second round on Feb. 21. □



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New beginnings after the kitchen table and beyond with new restaurant: Infini by Chef Urvin Croes

PALM BEACH — After spearheading The Kitchen Table for five years, receiving notable recognitions in USA Today, The Daily Meal and earning the #1 spot on Tripadvisor's list of Fine Dining Restaurants in the Caribbean, Chef Urvin Croes has now moved on to higher heights. Infini, his new chef's table, which opened at the Blue Residences in November 2020, allows the Michelin-trained Aruban culinary artist to create gastronomic experiences unconfined by cultural or regional expectations. The former The Kitchen Table space has since been renovated into a suitable culinary studio to host this vision. In describing these changes, Croes says: "We opened up the entire kitchen and elevated the dining tables so guests have a front row stadium-like view of each step of the preparations. The spotlights, which we carefully choreograph, follow the plates' transition from blank canvas into culinary works of art."

"It is a flavor that you cannot define, but you can create."

He had been sitting on the first menu for over a year. Inspired by umami, one of the five basic tastes, and also Japanese for "essence of deliciousness", Chef Croes strived to organically produce this palate in each dish of the eight-course Chef's Impression. "It is a flavor that you cannot define, but you can create. Take our popular langoustine for example; we combined elements that are rarely paired together: the bitter, sour and salty flavors of the lemon cream, kombucha, green grapes, watercress and achiote, fused with the sweet and delicate taste of the langoustine induce ultimate umami."

After hosting the first menu for three months, the Executive Chef introduced a second tour de force in February 2021 — this time a pescatarian menu dedicated to Lent, of which Croes has to say: "I wanted to focus on the finest fish in the world, they are the protagonists of this season." Visitors can experience the second Chef's Impression until May 2021, at which point Croes and his team will reveal exciting new flavors for the summer.



infini
by Urvin Croes



"Without a great team, there is no great chef"

"There is very little I can do by myself. Without a great team, there is no great chef", says Croes, while raving about the six young professionals sharing his kitchen. All graduates of Aruba's EPI College and familiar faces to the Chef as each one has completed their culinary internship under his guidance. In fact, Infini's Chef de Cuisine, Ashwin Maduro, was Urvin's very first student, before relocating to Amsterdam, where he worked at several Michelin-starred restaurants, including moshik (formally Samhoud Places). Having recently returned to Aruba, Chef Maduro is thrilled to be reunited with his first mentor and hopes to secure Aruba's space on the global map of unique culinary experiences. Similarly, after four years working in the two-Michelin starred restaurant Spectrum, Chef de Partie Moises Ramirez returned home to share his vast experience in formulating recipes with meticulous attention to detail and consistency. Further down the kitchen line, Chef de Partie Alvaro Yi, who has worked at the two-Michelin starred FG Restaurant, is all about expressing himself through cooking and plating to create art that you can eat.

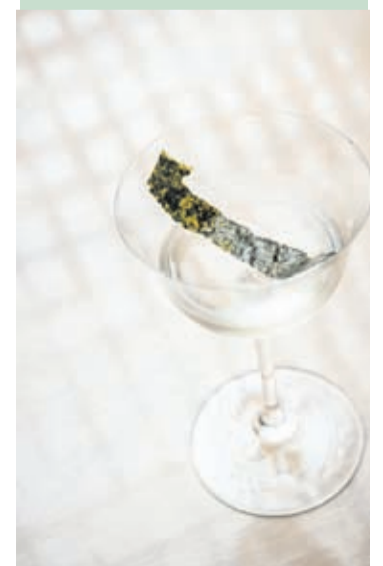
Mixologist Marc-Anthony Rannis brings eight years of experience in the fine dining industry to Infini. His fine craftsmanship is displayed in the unparalleled wine pairings and signature cocktails, which include his personally homemade syrups, garnishes and fresh local ingredients. Maître D' and Junior Sommelier Jessica Theysen, who previously managed renowned Chef Dennis Huwaë's Restaurant Daalder in Amsterdam, is a true storyteller. From the moment she serves the Salinity welcome drink and the culinary tale begins, she takes you on an adventure around the world to discover never-before-tasted combinations. Then, towards the end of the night, it is his time to shine — Pastry Chef Jean-Claude Werleman, that is. After spending the last two years perfecting his recipes in the Pastry Department of the Ritz Carlton Aruba, Werleman joins Infini to continue exploring his passion for experimenting with colors and bold flavors.

"It's time to show that Aruba is a culinary destination of its own"

"The goal is to leave our visitors speechless. The look on their faces whenever they take the first bite says it all and it is priceless", shares Croes, with a smile. Re-

claiming the spot of number one restaurant in the Caribbean is also in sight, but this time he will not stop there. "In the end, we want Aruba to be recognized for its culinary mastery. We have trained the best culinary artists right here on the island and they have proven themselves internationally in the most renowned kitchens in the world. Now it is time to show that Aruba is a culinary destination of its own. Who knows where that will take us; hopefully to infinity and beyond."

Infini located at Blue Residences currently serves a six-course Chef's Impression to up to 21 guests starting at 6:30PM. To make reservations visit www.infiniaruba.com or call +297-699-3982. □



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Will the Cultural and Creative Industry get a Chance in the Next Aruban Government?

ORANJESTAD – Yesterday the Aruban community was completely paralyzed by the fall of the coalition government, “Gabinete Wever-Croes”. The cabinet was represented by three political parties on the island, namely MEP, POR, and RED. Over the years it has been proven to be more difficult to govern within a coalition than ever before. It seemed like it was a constant struggle to keep all parties in line and to make sure that there was consensus on issues that impacted the Aruban community. Aruba has for the most part only experienced one party cabinets. However, four years ago the people clearly wanted a shift in regards to this. Now, the Creative Islander has never really discussed political developments individually, but only when it related to the local cultural and creative industry. Besides the fact that the United Nations has declared 2021, the year of the creative industry, this new political development does raise the question: will the Cultural and Creative Industry (CCI) get a chance in the Next Aruban Government?

Just as a refresher, “the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) fall under a wide-ranging definition of the creative economy. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the cultural industries include sub-niche markets such as music, writing, art, fashion, design and media industries and are inclusive of technology and craft-intensive production. Whereas, the creative industries consist of a wider range of production activities including goods and services that rely on innovation, research and development (R&D) such as film,

museums, galleries and photography” (UNESCO/LUMEC, 2021). So the CCI is a combination of these two worlds. A place where culture and creativity meet innovation.

For three years I have been advocating for reform on aspects such as Aruban public policy, the tax system, the economy, education, social improvement, and especially on the Creative Industry. For more than eight years, Aruban governments have indicated that the Creative Industry is a potential economy to consider on the island. It not only has less environmental impact compared to all other economies, it could stimulate the island to have a better skilled labor force (less cheap labor, more specializations), and also increase innovations within the community through culture and creativity in order to reach more sustainability for our people.

However, it has been a struggle for academics like me to get this movement going, not because people do not understand the potential, but there has not been enough political will to endorse the development of the CCI on Aruba. Simultaneously, over the last four years the cultural and creative sector has been roaming and surviving without a proper national cultural policy. For months on end I have been requesting the ministry of culture to work on developing a vision, strategic workplan with adequate indicators for implementation and evaluation.

Unfortunately, the cultural sector was never attended to by the current de-missionary government. Maybe the will was there, but the capacity and expertise were lack-



ing. An interesting observation is also to note that the Minister of Culture was also the Minister of Finance and the Economy. It would not surprise me if it was the case that her attention and expertise was on the latter and that the financial pressure took more of her time. However, that is not an excuse. I do acknowledge that COVID-19 has impacted the island, but this pandemic erupted at the end of the first quarter in 2020.

During the pandemic, the cultural sector and all professionals in the field took a huge hit and I could notice the consequences of not having a structured (formalized) creative and cultural economy. Let's start with the lack of representation of creative professionals at the round table. With no surprise, other economic pillars such as the tourism industry did and still does have a (big) seat. Even though that the country depends heavily on tourism for economic growth, this situation does shed light on the detrimental situation and this is something that needs to be remedied quickly.

As a consequence of the pandemic, international rating agencies have downgraded Aruba and express that “the downgrade reflects the sharp economic down-

turn expected in Aruba from the loss of tourism receipts in 2020-2021 and the severe deterioration in fiscal and external accounts as a result” (Fitch, 2020). We can't continue to remain a one economy island. We are currently surviving, but today we have COVID-19, but what will the future bring? Culture (in the future) cannot continue to suffer simply because of the political heat with the Netherlands, lack of local political will, Covid-19, or lack of funding. Do these issues impact the development?, yes, but for years we have seen limited financial and capacity investment in the cultural and creative sector.

In the beginning of March, as an academic I attended the Abu Dabhi Culture Summit 2021 virtually. What an amazing and inspiring week that was to be in a (virtual) environment with other creative and cultural professionals from all angles of the world coming together to discuss how we can move forward with the current pandemic without limiting the development of creative industries around the world. This summit was the perfect space for experts to share their best practices and to share how they are mitigating the pandemic's residual effects on the industry.

Continued on Page 10

Will the Cultural and Creative Industry get a Chance in the Next Aruban Government?

Continued from Page 9

While I was taking in the knowledge I was wondering when Aruba will also participate and be part of this movement.

As a lecturer, researcher, policy specialist, and as a columnist I will keep advocating for evidence-based policy reforms and for the development of a cultural and creative industry on Aruba. We know from best practices around the world that:

- The CCI has cultural benefits, creates economic value and demonstrates relative resilience to external shocks over other industries as evidenced by its continued growth in the past 20 years.
- Creatives play a role in preserving the history of areas, foster diversity in terms of culture, race, age and encourage social cohesion

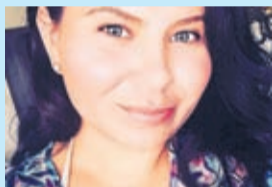
because their expressions tend to bring people together and build communities.

- The CCI play an important role in helping individuals and countries shape their identities.
- Technology is an integral part of CCIs in the global market because much of the content for the digital economy is generated by these industries. Examples of this include the consumption of videos and movies, music and books on digital platforms as well as online and mobile games.
- CCIs are also important for employment by simulating more expertise, social inclusion and less cheap labour.

Many international agencies such as UNDP, CARICOM, and UNESCO have suggested several strategies for developing countries, par-

ticularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and the Middle East to explore in order to make the most of opportunities presented by the creative economy and promote growth. This includes developing islands such as Aruba. Overall they propose "that developing countries should integrate CCI opportunities into their national strategies, policies and budgets; boost the protection of intellectual property rights (IPR); expand regional ties; develop, retain and attract human capital required for CCIs; lastly, collect data for CCIs in order to magnify the dynamics of these industries, improve planning and policy-making" (LUMEC, 2021).

This is what I will keep advocating for, because I strongly believe that Aruba can! When this will happen will remain a mystery. Hopefully a lot more progress can be achieved in the next Aruban government. To be continued. □



Biography Thais Franken

Thais G. Franken (25) is a local academic researcher and is currently teaching at the University of Aruba in the Faculty of Arts and Science (FAS). She is a graduate of the University of Maastricht (UM) and the United Nations University Maastricht Economic and Social Research

Institute on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT) where she obtained her double Master of Science degree in Public Policy and Human Development with a specialization in Innovation, Institutions and Development. She has been researching the Aruban Creative Industry for quite some time and has collaborated with several local cultural NGOs to bring awareness of the possible impact of the Creative Industry on the island. It was her research on the "Socio-economic and Cultural Impact of the Creative Industry of the Aruban Sustainable Development" that inspired the emergence of the "Creative Islander" column back in 2018. Thais is very passionate about topics such as sustainability, innovation, culture, creativity, cultural heritage, education, social entrepreneurship and their role in public management. Next to her academic interests, she enjoys reading, writing, dancing and cooking.

Honoring of a loyal visitor at Caribbean Palm Village



NOORD — Recently, Kimberley Richardson of the Aruba Tourism Authority had the great pleasure to honor one of Aruba's loyal and friendly visitors as Goodwill Ambassador of Aruba. The Goodwill Ambassador Certificate is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism, as a token of appreciation to the guests who visit Aruba 20 years and more consecutively.

The honoree was Mrs. Lynne Stephenson from Connecticut, USA!

This lovely lady stated that she loves the island very much, especially for its year-round sunny weather, blue waters and sandy beaches, delicious variety of foods and Aruba's warm and friendly people.

Richardson together with the representatives of the Caribbean Palm Village presented the certificate to the honoree, handed over some presents and also thanked her for choosing Aruba as her favorite vacation destination and as her home away from home. □

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More vaccinated travelers mean pricier hotels, flights

By **SAM KEMMIS** of **Nerd-Wallet**

The cost of travel will slowly rebound from historic lows as more people receive COVID-19 vaccinations and book long-deferred trips, according to industry experts. This time last year, air traffic in the U.S. plummeted, with 95% fewer travelers passing through Transportation Security Administration checkpoints in April 2020 compared with April 2019. This reduced demand led to a corresponding decrease in airfare prices. The average cost of a domestic round-trip ticket in the second quarter of 2020 dropped 28% from the same period in 2019, down to \$259, according to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics. Few travelers were monitoring these prices at the time since so few were booking flights. But now, with COVID-19 vaccinations opening the possibility of travel to millions more Americans each week, prices are once again set to change.

If you're one of those would-be travelers, experts cautiously advise booking



In this Feb. 18, 2021 file photo, a traveller wears a face covering while hurrying through a near-empty check-in counter area in the main terminal of Denver International Airport in Denver.

Associated Press

your travel soon. Much remains uncertain, but prices are unlikely to return to 2020 levels.

FLIGHT DEMAND SET TO TAKE OFF

Experts who track travel deals and consumer interest say demand for airplane seats is likely to increase, driving prices back

up. Domestic airfare prices are expected to rise 4%-5% every month until summer 2021, said Adit Damodaran, an economist with Hopper, a travel search tool. "A lot of that is based on the vaccination rollout." And this increased demand might combine with decreased supply. Airlines

scaled back routes and flight frequency in 2020, parking aircraft and furloughing staff. They may be slow to return capacity to pre-pandemic levels, even as bookings pick up steam. "Airlines are burning so much cash, so what we're seeing is that they're slowly expanding supply," said

Jesse Neugarten, who founded the flight deal newsletter Dollar Flight Club. "If we have to shut down travel again, they don't want to get caught in a similar situation as they did in 2020."

HOTEL PRICES MAY RISE SLOWLY

Hotel prices have also dropped during the pandemic, though not as uniformly. Room rates in February in New York City were down 37% year-over-year according to Hopper's data, while small-town hotels saw only a 5% dip. This reflects a larger exodus from crowded cities during the pandemic. This pattern could reverse as vaccinated travelers flock back into metropolitan areas later in 2021, driving prices up.

But tourism accounts for only part of travel demand. Business travel, which has all but ceased during the pandemic, will likely be slower to return. This could keep hotel prices low throughout 2021, especially in large cities. It could also suppress airfare prices somewhat, even as more tourists take to the skies. □

WTO: Vaccination lag poses threat to rebounding global trade

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP)

— The World Trade Organization is raising its estimate for the rebound in global trade in goods but warning that the COVID-19 pandemic still poses the greatest threat to a recovery that is being hampered by lagging vaccinations, regional disparities and weakness in the service industry.

Demand in North America should be a major factor driving rebounding demand for goods thanks to the large fiscal relief and stimulus spending by the U.S. government.

WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala called for a better access to vaccines for people in poorer countries. Rapid development of vaccines have given the world a

chance to halt the pandemic, "but this opportunity could be squandered if large numbers of countries and people do not have equal access to vaccines, she said Wednesday.

"A rapid, global and equitable vaccine rollout is the best stimulus that we have," Okonjo-Iweala said at a news conference presenting the annual trade forecast.

She called for better distribution of vaccine production facilities across the world so poor countries do not have to "stand in line" for vaccines.

"The inequity of access is glaring, and this cannot happen again," Okonjo-Iweala said.

That the container ship mishap that temporarily shut down freight traffic in the

Suez Canal could cause so much disruption was a sign that trade in goods remains "relatively robust," she said. Meanwhile, services businesses are in more trouble, and the balance of risks are tilted to the downside.

The WTO said it expects merchandise trade to rise by 8.0% in 2021, after having fallen 5.3% in 2020. Trade growth should then slow to 4.0% in 2022, a recovery that will still leave trade below its pre-pandemic level.

The 2020 drop was less than expected due to the robust second half rebound thanks to strong monetary and fiscal support by many governments.

The Geneva-based international organization foresaw a slide of 9.2% in its



In this Monday, March 1, 2021 file photo, New Director-General of the World Trade Organisation Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, left, walks at the entrance of the WTO, following a photo-op upon her arrival at the WTO headquarters to take office in Geneva, Switzerland.

Associated Press

estimate released in October.

"Prospects for a quick recovery in world trade have improved as merchandise trade expanded more rapidly than expected in the second half of last year," the WTO said in a statement.

"The strong rebound in global trade since the mid-

dle of last year has helped soften the blow of the pandemic for people, businesses, and economies," Okonjo-Iweala said. "But as long as large numbers of people and countries are excluded from sufficient vaccine access, it will stifle growth, and risk reversing the health and economic recovery worldwide." □



By Carlos M Viana, CCN, OMD

Oranjestad - In the Caribbean Sea, on the sunny side of the world, sits the ABC islands, Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao. Just twelve degrees latitude south, is the greatest concentration of sunlight on earth, the equator. In latitude, each degree is approximately 69 miles/111 kilometers apart, this means lots of sunshine and ultraviolet (UV) light on our Islands.

Sunlight encourages the production of white blood cells to boost the immune system and fight infection. UV rays from the sun act as a natural antiseptic, helping to combat viruses and bacteria. A little UV light eases common skin problems including acne, dermatitis and psoriasis. Most

skin complaints are caused by over-sensitivity. The sun's UV rays help to combat this sensitivity. Not seeing sunlight for prolonged periods, like during grey skies of winter can cause Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), where the person can feel "sad" or depressed. The sun even promotes the release of proteins, which makes your body's use of oxygen more effective, helping heart attack patients survive longer. However, you can have too much of a good thing, so limit your exposure to no more than 15 minutes a day before applying a sun cream, and do not go out in the hottest part of the day, between 11:00am and 2:00pm. If this is not possible, wear protective clothing and sun-


screen. Also influenced by the sun is melatonin, a hormone that naturally makes you sleepy. Melatonin levels rise when the sun goes down to help you sleep. Levels then drop, when the sun rises, waking you up. Insomnia and irregular sleep patterns tend improve in the summer when we are exposed to more sunlight. Are you guilty of staying up late with artificial lighting, or do you work late shifts, thus messing up your body's natural sleep cycle? If melatonin levels are not working correctly, it affects your body's ability to make vitamin D. Vitamin D is called the "sunshine vitamin" because it can be made in the skin from exposure to sunlight. We assume that those of us, who live in sunny climates, have adequate vitamin D production. However, when we make assumptions, we're limiting ourselves to a narrow view of things. Vitamin D is vital both for healthy bones and preventing rickets, a childhood disorder in which bones become soft and prone to fractures and deformity. Another benefit from Vitamin D – it fights viruses naturally. Vitamin D is actually a group of hormones responsible for enhancing absorption of calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphate and zinc. In humans, the most important compounds in this group are vitamin D3 and vitamin D2. In my constant search to stay current and improve

The Sunny Side

the health of my family and clients, I read many studies that said an estimated 1 billion people worldwide, across all ethnicities and age groups have a vitamin D deficiency! This 'pandemic' of vitamin D deficiency has mainly been attributed to lifestyle and environmental factors that reduce exposure to sunlight, which is required for ultraviolet-B (UVB)-induced vitamin D production in the skin. Dark skin absorbs more UVB in the melanin of their skin than light skin does. This means more sun exposure is required to produce the same amount of vitamin D. Wow! Like many people, I thought dark skin would be more effective in producing Vitamin D not less. I decided to test some of my clients Vitamin D levels, choosing a variety of ages, sex and body types of those only living in Aruba, where we have strong sunlight. When we received the results that both shocked and humbled me; all of us came out vitamin D deficient! The initial test was just a small selection of people. Now I recommend checking not only for Vitamin D, but also Cortisol, which shows possible deficiency of melatonin levels, to see if melatonin is affecting vitamin D and if supplementation is needed. This is especially important for people in climates where the sun doesn't shine long and strong, but also here on the sunny side. Most oil-rich fish such as salmon, mackerel, and her-

ring contain some vitamin D3, but we are not getting sufficient amounts of D2 from our foods anymore with modern farming and altered food conditions. Vitamin D is an independent risk factor for premature aging. Emerging research supports the possible role of vitamin D in prevention of cancer, heart disease, fractures and falls, autoimmune diseases, influenza, type-2 diabetes, and depression. Health care providers have begun to increase their recommendations for vitamin D3 supplementation to least 1000 IU per day. Your body is able to convert D3 into D2 if needed. Personally, I recommend testing your vitamin D status first, then with results, when deficient supplementing with up to 15,000 IU's/week for women and 20,000 IU's/week for men of a high quality vitamin D3; then testing again after three to six months for adjustment. Doing this, I have achieved positive results. Get The Point! Making assumptions is natural, but inefficient. By not using all the tools available to be sure what is really happening, the assumption can cost more in the long run. Contact us about testing your vitamin D levels so we can show you how to adjust your lifestyle and if you need a little "sunshine vitamin" supplementation. Meanwhile, get outside and soak up some sun. We are so blessed to live on the sunny side of the "street." □

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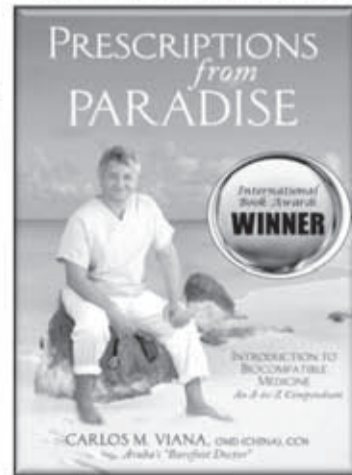


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'Concrete Cowboy' shows Philadelphia's Black cowboy culture

By **JAKE COYLE**
AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Historians estimate that 1 in 4 American cowboys were Black but you would be hard pressed to find a movie genre whiter than the Western. "Concrete Cowboy," an urban Western about African American riders in Philadelphia starring Idris Elba, is about an often unseen — and persisting — Black cowboy culture.

"Concrete Cowboy" is a father-son drama set around Fletcher Street Stables, one of the oldest and last-remaining of Philadelphia's hardscrabble inner-city stables. It dates back more than 100 years to when horse-drawn wagons were used to deliver produce, laundry and milk. But through tenacity and improvisation, Fletcher Street has remained a cherished refuge and an ardent pastime for both kids and adults on the streets of Philadelphia's Strawberry Mansion. "That's a tough neighborhood but if you're on top of horse, people literally look up to you," says Gregory Neri, author of the novel "Ghetto Cowboy," the basis for the film directed by Ricky Staub.

Neri first heard about the stables in 2008 when a friend sent him a link to a Life magazine article about Fletcher Street.

"The first image I saw was this Black kid on the back of a horse in the middle of the inner city in North Philly," says Neri. "I had the reac-



This image provided by Netflix shows Idris Elba, left, and Caleb McLaughlin in a scene from the film "Concrete Cowboy," premiering April 2 on Netflix.

tion most people have, which is: 'What is this? What's going on here?'" "Concrete Cowboy," which premiered last fall at the Toronto International Film Festival and debuts Friday on Netflix, shines perhaps the brightest light yet on an abiding community of Black cowboys now facing an uncertain future. It was shot in the vacant lots Fletcher Street cowboys ride in, and its co-stars — alongside a cast of Elba, Caleb McLaughlin, Method Man and Jharrel Jerome — include many of the stables' actual riders.

In a genre that's been perpetually drawn to American myth and open plains, "Concrete Cowboy" is ur-

ban, contemporary and authentic.

"My dad was a big Western fan. I grew up sort of watching them with a side eye," says Elba, also a producer. "It didn't occur to me until the Bob Marley song 'Buffalo Soldier,' which opened my interest about Black cowboys. And it occurred to me: I've been making films forever and I've never been offered a Western. You realize there's a deep history that spans America and Africa over decades, centuries in fact, that you've never seen in film." As film historian Mia Mask, introducing a series on Black Westerns for the Criterion Channel, has noted: "Hollywood definitely

whitewashed the image of the frontier." The word "cowboy," itself, was a racist term for a Black ranch worker. (A white one was a cowhand.) John Wayne's character in John Ford's "The Searchers" was based on a Black man.

For the actors, encountering and enmeshing with the community was an eye-opening experience. McLaughlin, the 19-year-old "Stranger Things" star, plays Cole, a wayward 15-year-old sent by his mother to live with his estranged father, Harp (Elba). "It was all a new experience," says McLaughlin. "Being in Philly, there are actually horses that live in people's homes there. It's

not just two blocks of people with horses. It's a whole community. There are people with cowboy boots walking around. There are babies riding ponies. I was like, 'Wow, this is different.'" Staub, making his directorial debut, had initially planned to shoot the entire movie with local non-professional actors.

"Obviously, when Idris Elba shows interest in being in your movie, you pivot," he says, chuckling. "When I was talking with Idris, it was probably a little brazen, I said, 'I don't want this to feel like Halloween, like you're playing dress up. To me, you need to do the most work to fit into this world and not vice versa.'" Staub first learned about Fletcher Street while living in Philadelphia. One rider that he befriended, Eric Miller, introduced him around and they began to conceive, a little quixotically, of a movie. Miller, who had once been set to play Harp, was shot and killed just a week before prep began on the film. "Concrete Cowboys" is dedicated to him. Still, Miller's vision helped guide the production.

"Eric echoed something to me that really had a lot of impact. When he was growing up, he loved cowboy films. These guys even played cowboy videogames on their phones. Everything was about that cowboy life," says Staub. "But he didn't have a film growing up where cowboys looked like him. □

Associated Press



This image released by FX shows Kayvan Novak as Nandor in a scene from the comedy "What We Do in the Shadows."

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — "What We Do in the Shadows" are among the series featured in a virtual edition

Lovecraft Country' part of virtual festival celebrating TV

of the Paley Center's annual festival celebrating TV programs and their makers.

A 20th-anniversary reunion of cast members and creators of "Six Feet Under" also is part of PaleyFestLA, on demand starting this week on Yahoo Entertainment. This is the second year that the festival has been forced online because of pandemic restrictions. Some panel dis-

cussions include celebrity moderators, among them "The Late Late Show with James Corden," moderated by Andrew Rannells; "Evil," with Whoopi Goldberg and "Ted Lasso" with moderator Patton Oswalt. Sessions with stars and creators of "The Good Doctor" and "Big Sky" round out the festival lineup. Highlights of PaleyFest events past, including for "The Golden Girls" and

"The Big Bang Theory," are available on the Paley Center's YouTube page at youtube.com/user/paley-center. □



Column: Tyson, Holyfield and a walk down memory lane

By **TIM DAHLBERG**
AP Sports Columnist

The word on the street — actually, on social media — is that Mike Tyson may get in the ring with Evander Holyfield for a third time. Right now, Holyfield's ears are safe but there's money to be made and if there was ever a pair of heavyweights who needed a lucrative second career it's the two former champions. Not to be outdone, Oscar De La Hoya says he plans to fight again at the age of 48, too.

Apparently, De La Hoya has forgotten the terrible beating Manny Pacquiao gave him in his last real fight 13 years ago and plans to enter the ring July 3 against an opponent to be named later.

Or maybe he won't. De La Hoya, you might recall, also said he was running for president a few years back and his name never appeared on a ballot. He's also a boxing promoter now, and anything a promoter says is automatically suspect.

Whatever. I'm not so sure people will line up to buy De La Hoya against anyone, though predicting what fans are willing to spend money for a pay-per-view is an inexact art, at best.

No, boxing isn't dead. Far from it.

It's just become a sport for the geriatric and anyone with a few million followers on social media who can throw a punch.

Consider this: The biggest PPV set for April features a YouTube celebrity (Jake Paul) in the main event against a former MMA fighter. Other fights on the card involve long retired light heavyweight Antonio Tarver and veteran MMA heavyweight Frank Mir, while a Colombian musician, Reykon, takes on Joe Fournier, a British boxer who briefly fought for money but hasn't had a fight in five years.

It may enrage boxing purists, but there's money to be made, as the company that brought you Tyson and Roy Jones Jr.

showed with a surprisingly successful November pay-per-view that reportedly grossed more than \$80 million. With Snoop Dogg and entertainers such as Justin Bieber, The Black Keys and others there's also a ton of entertainment value for the \$49.99 it will cost at home. Compare that to a real fight that is basically three hours of a lousy undercard and long periods of inactivity with a big fight at the end and it's no contest. The same price will buy you a real heavyweight fight two weeks later, but only devoted fans would think of spending it to watch Andy Ruiz Jr. and Chris Arreola mix it up with little at stake except their records.

That's just one example of how boxing has only itself



Mike Tyson attends a celebrity golf tournament on Aug. 2, 2019, in Dana Point, Calif.

Associated Press

to blame for becoming a mostly niche sport. Promoters for decades have taken fan money for fights that don't deliver — and never tried to move from the original model of one big fight

for one big price.

When the biggest fights did happen, they were often years too late, like Tyson and Lennox Lewis and the bout between Manny Pacquiao and Floyd May-

weather Jr. that should have been made five years earlier. The prices fans paid also kept trending up, to the magical \$99.95 price point for Mayweather-Pacquiao.

A new outfit called Triller went about things differently in its debut telecast of Tyson and Roy Jones Jr. Snoop was one of the hosts and there was plenty of entertainment along with production values at a top level.

The company claimed the telecast was in the top 10 for all pay-per-views, and it's easy to see why. There was intrigue and entertainment for all age groups in a hybrid boxing/entertainment play that delivered even more than it promised. □

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Welcome back, fans! MLB openers bring Soto, Tatis and crowds

By **BEN WALKER**
AP Baseball Writer

Great to see ya, Buster Posey. Been a while, Tony La Russa. Good luck, Madison Bumgarner and every other National League pitcher toting a bat.

From Comerica Park to Coors Field to the Coliseum, Major League Baseball is set to roll out a big welcome mat Thursday.

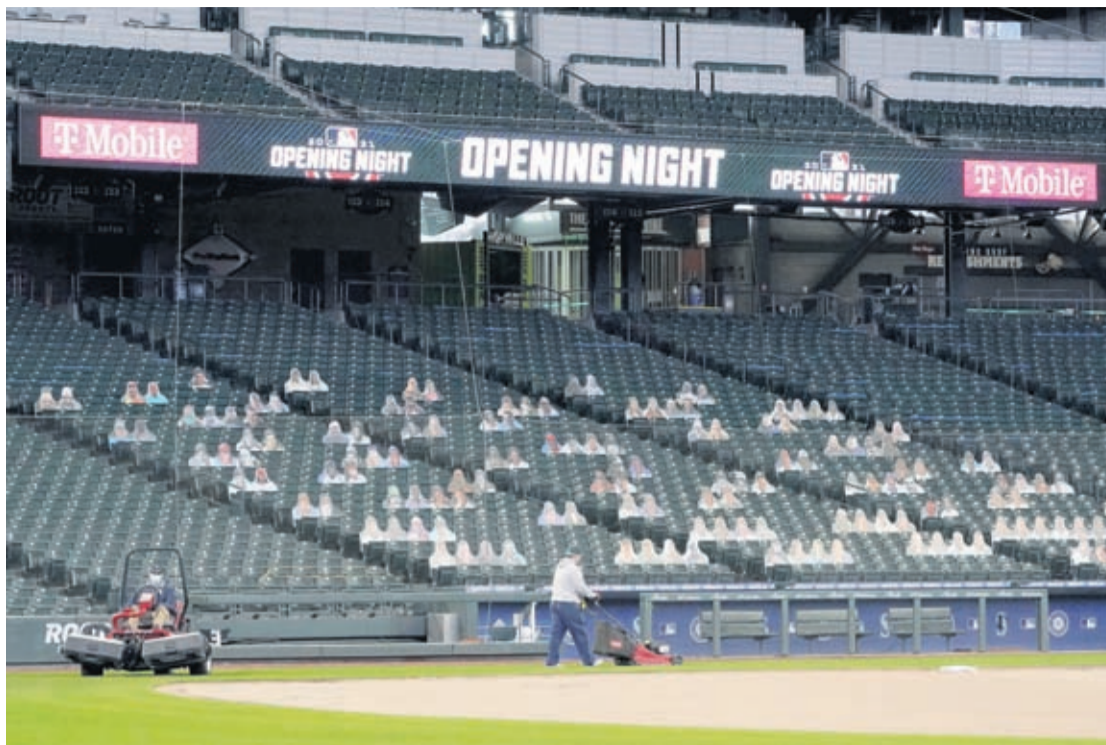
Most of all, this opening day, it'll be for the fans.

When Gerrit Cole throws the first pitch of the season — weather permitting — nearly 11,000 people could be in the stands at Yankee Stadium. Sitting in socially distanced seats and wearing masks, inside a park that will continue to operate as a mass coronavirus vaccination site.

Far from normal. But after a year in which fans weren't permitted at any regular-season game because of COVID-19 protocols, no longer will "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" strangely echo around empty ballparks during the seventh-inning stretch.

"That's how it's supposed to be, I think," said Bumgarner, ready to start for the Arizona Diamondbacks against Fernando Tatis Jr., Manny Machado and the San Diego Padres.

"That's what we're doing. It's an entertainment business. We're all playing a game and competing and everyone's got their team they



Grounds crew workers mow near the first-base foul line at T-Mobile Park, the home of the Seattle Mariners baseball team, Monday, March 22, 2021, in Seattle as photos in the stands demonstrate how fans attending reduced-capacity games will be separated into "seating pods" to avoid the spread of COVID-19.

pull for or just likes watching the game in general," he said.

The crowd sizes will vary.

At Fenway Park, where Xander Bogaerts and the Boston Red Sox host Baltimore, 12% of capacity will be allowed. At Globe Life Field in Texas, where the Rangers open Monday, a full 100% will be permitted.

The Rangers didn't have any fans in their \$1.2 billion palace that opened last year during the pandemic-shortened 60-game season. But 11,000 spectators were inside the Arlington, Texas, park when Clayton

Kershaw, Mookie Betts, Corey Seager and the Los Angeles Dodgers beat Tampa Bay in MLB's first neutral-site World Series.

Boosted by signing NL Cy Young Award winner Trevor Bauer, the pitching-rich Dodgers start in Colorado. Kershaw gets the opener against the Rockies, while Bauer goes in the second game. "I'm pumped up for it. Especially pumped up to get back in front of the LA fans for my first home start," Bauer said.

"This is going to be cool, putting on the Dodger uniform, playing with this group of

guys. I'm really pumped up that baseball is back, especially now that we get to have fans in the stands," he said.

How many will actually be in the box seats and bleachers on April Fools' Day might depend on the weather.

Rain is forecast in Boston, New York and Philadelphia. Wet in Washington, too, where a marquee matchup is waiting at Nationals Park: Two-time Cy Young winner Jacob deGrom of the Mets faces big-hitting Juan Soto at the plate and three-time Cy champ Max

Scherzer on the mound.

Temperatures are supposed to be in the 30s with gusty winds at Wrigley Field when Kris Bryant and the Chicago Cubs host Pittsburgh. Also in the 30s in Detroit, where Cleveland ace Shane Bieber faces the Tigers, and in Cincinnati, where the Reds take on St. Louis newcomer Nolan Arenado.

Jack Flaherty pitches for the Cardinals. Two teammates from his Southern California high school a decade ago also start on opening day — Max Fried for the Braves in Philadelphia and Lucas Giolito for the Chicago White Sox against Mike Trout and rejuvenated two-way star Shohei Ohtani at Angel Stadium.

Arenado and Bauer are among the many stars who switched teams in the offseason. The Padres acquired Blake Snell and Yu Darvish, the Mets traded for Francisco Lindor, Toronto signed George Springer and the Yankees hope low-risk moves for Corey Kluber and Jameson Taillon pay off.

Some teams will benefit from getting their own players back on the field.

Posey of the Giants, Ryan Zimmerman of the Nats, David Price of the Dodgers and Marcus Stroman of the Mets were among those who opted out of playing last year because of coronavirus concerns. □

Associated Press

Osaka's 23-match win streak ends against Sakkari in Miami



Maria Sakkari, of Greece, reacts after winning a point against Naomi Osaka, of Japan, during the quarterfinals of the Miami Open tennis tournament, Wednesday, March 31, 2021, in Miami Gardens, Fla. Sakkari won 6-0, 6-4.

Associated Press

By **STEVEN WINE**
AP Sports Writer

MIAMI (AP) — No. 2 Naomi Osaka's 23-match winning streak ended Wednesday when she lost to Maria Sakkari of Greece in the quarterfinals of the Miami Open, 6-0, 6-4.

The defeat was Osaka's first since February 2020, and it ended any chance of reclaiming the No. 1 ranking this week from Ash Barty, who is in the semifinals.

Osaka won her fourth Grand Slam title at the Australian Open last month, but in five Miami appearances she has never ad-

vanced beyond the quarterfinals.

Against the No. 23-seeded Sakkari, Osaka lost 15 consecutive points on her serve to fall behind and blew a 4-1 lead in the second set. She faced a break point on seven of her eight service games.

Sakkari earned her sixth career win over a top-five opponent. She's still in the tournament only because she saved six match points in the fourth round before beating American Jessica Pegula.

Osaka took a 40-0 lead in the opening game but

didn't win another point on her serve until the second set. When she ended the drought, she received a big ovation from the small crowd, which she followed up with her best stretch of tennis.

But Sakkari rallied. From 40-0 down she won five consecutive points, hitting one last thunderous return to break for a 5-4 lead. She then coolly served out the victory.

She made only 41% of her first serves, and Sakkari repeatedly pounced on the second serve to take control of rallies. □